

With the writers Compliments

A FEW NOTES UPON THE ESKIMO OF CAPE
PRINCE OF WALES, HUDSON'S STRAIT.

BY F. F. PAYNE,
Meteorological Office, Toronto, Ont.

[From the PROCEEDINGS OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT
OF SCIENCE, 1889.]

SALEM PRESS PUBLISHING AND PRINTING CO.

A FEW NOTES UPON THE ESKIMO OF CAPE PRINCE OF WALES, HUDSON'S STRAIT. By F. F. PAYNE, Meteorological Office, Toronto, Ont.

ONE of the chief troubles to contend with in making notes upon the customs of the Eskimo is their extreme sensitiveness to ridicule, and it is therefore most necessary that you should put on your gravest expression when questioning them. Sometimes this sensitiveness is very interesting to watch. Upon one occasion when employing my favorite Eskimo, Ugaluk, as an assistant in my boat and telling him to throw out the anchor he immediately picked it up and carrying it to the bow was in the act of casting it overboard without a rope attached to it. We were just in time to stop him and naturally laughed, rather immoderately, at which he sat down in the boat and covering his face with his hands remained in that position for a long time, and was too shy to speak to us.

If offended at any time with their own people, or either of my men, they would immediately leave and without saying a word would go home and for some time they were not to be seen. We sometimes regretted that they could not be offended oftener, for most of them required continual watching when anything movable was about.

One afternoon several men entered our house and standing near the fire refused most positively to go out. Knowing that promptness of action has a good effect upon them, one of them was immediately handled rather roughly and stumbling fell as he was bundled out of the door, the others following suit. For a minute we thought there was going to be trouble; the next moment, however, they picked themselves up and all turning with smiling faces said "chimo, chimo," which means we are friends. I may add that orders to leave our house after this were never disobeyed.

Whilst, as a rule, the Eskimo looks upon the white man as born to do him favors, those met with would sometimes offer payment for our services; and for the burial of an aged relative, who died when his friends were away hunting, one of my men received the valuable gift of about two gallons of blubber which of course he accepted with many thanks. Nevertheless if an Eskimo was given an unusually valuable present, he would immediately turn round and ask for the most impossible things as though he thought you were now in a good humor and now was the time to get all he could from you.

As far as could be seen it seemed to be the general belief that all property, especially in the way of food, belonged to everybody in common and therefore, if you held more than another it was only because you or your family were physically strong enough to protect it. Few men of course would steal from one another when food was plentiful, thereby making enemies for themselves, but, when food is scarce, might is right, and all make note of the position of their neighbors caches before the winter's snow covers them.

At one time after a raid had been made upon my storehouse by some rather desperate Eskimo, my trusted friend, Ugaluk, informed me that his wife had gone to get a share of the plunder. At first we were inclined to

harangue him for infidelity but soon saw he had not the slightest idea it was wrong to receive stolen property. Upon another occasion, under similar circumstances, I induced Ugaluk to help me track the robbers and with some trouble we traced them to a deep gorge where all we could see was a large hole in the snow. This was the doorway of an igloo, ten feet below the surface, which had been covered by continuous drifting of the snow. Into this hole Ugaluk dived while I remained outside. He soon returned and asked me to follow, which I did upon my knees for some distance until I found myself in a very dirty dimly-lighted room. Sitting near the lamp was a woman and by her were three children, these being the only occupants of the place. The woman denied most emphatically any knowledge of the theft and was not moved in the least when informed that her husband would stand a chance of being shot if he took part in another burglary. Feeling that perhaps after all we were mistaken we were just leaving, when the woman called us back and holding up a small piece of salt beef said, this was all her husband had taken as unconcernedly as though she had never denied it and as though he had found it outside our door instead of having done a great deal of damage in securing it.

The Eskimo, of all races, are the most free and in no case do they consider a man their superior unless he or his family are physically stronger or are better hunters than others. These superior men are treated with little deference, though they are usually sought for in the settlement of disputes and sometimes act as public executioners. Ugaluk, who had all these qualities, was usually obeyed when an order was given by him, and we were much interested with his story of a comparatively recent execution which he undertook for the good of the community. Walking up to the offender he held him in conversation for a few minutes when suddenly drawing a knife from his sleeve he plunged it into his breast and then finished him upon the ground, afterwards carrying his body out upon his kyak and dropping it into the sea. As Ugaluk related his story in a whisper he trembled violently and it was quite evident he was haunted with certain fears.

As in civilized communities there were several restless individuals living among those we met who at different times had dwelt in many parts of the coast, one of whom at least had lived far up Fox Channel. These individuals are employed as traders and evidently are the means of keeping the language intact.

As is well known, work is pretty well divided among these people, the men doing all the hunting and making and repairing implements, while the women take part in everything else, even in the making of boats and building houses, though the more laborious part of this work is performed by the men.

When moving to a distant part of the coast a small pack is put upon each dog, and the men and women divide equally the heavy goods to be carried. When the snow is soft the dogs are shod with seal skin shoes.

The Eskimo's powers of endurance are wonderful. During the winter

of 1885-86 many of those about me were reduced to mere skeletons through starvation, and although they were helped as much as possible, several, it is to be feared, died not far from us. Some had eaten the skin covering of their bed and were only saved by an occasional seal being killed and by the few lemmings they could catch under the snow. In one instance a case of what appeared to be economic hibernating was noted. Some distance from the Observatory a woman and her son were found closely huddled together in a house completely closed and not much larger than themselves. They said they had not had any food for some time, but expected friends in a few days. Leaving what food we had we returned to the station, and extremely bad weather coming on some days afterwards, we had almost forgotten these people. Two weeks later we were reminded of them by an Eskimo having passed that way who said he had not seen them. Fearing they were dead we went over with provisions and much to our surprise found them, though little more than parcels of bones, perfectly well, and they declared they had lain there ever since. These people with others were soon stout and hearty when food became more plentiful.

In many of the narrow gravelly passes in the rocky hills, low walls were often noticed that had undoubtedly been built many years ago. These were in a straight line from one hill to another and were usually nothing more than single stones about a foot high placed close to each other. Many conjectures as to their use were made and taking Ugaluk to one of these walls one day he informed me that many years ago when large numbers of Eskimo lived here and wood was extremely scarce some would bind sharp stones to their feet and lying upon their backs behind these walls others would drive the deer, which were then very numerous, and as the deer passed over the walls the hidden hunters would strike with their stone-tipped feet and would often kill many of them in this way. Regarding the scarcity of wood it may be added that even now many Eskimo have not harpoons because they cannot procure a piece of wood large enough for a handle.

Having often heard of the dislike the Eskimo is believed to have to a white man exploring the graves of their dead, we determined to test this and purposely went with several Eskimo, passing near where a number were buried. Here I stopped at one grave which had evidently long ago been visited by wolves or dogs, for the covering of stones had been dragged away and the bones were scattered in every direction. To my surprise the Eskimo looked on quite unconcernedly as I turned the skull and bones over with my stick, and, if anything, they seemed rather amused than otherwise. Suddenly I feigned an expression of fear, and while they looked at me made a bound forward, screaming as I fled. In a moment they were after me screaming apparently in greatest terror. Soon stopping, however, I burst into laughter and was immediately followed by all excepting the children who evidently could not see the joke, nor would they return to the grave. During the remainder of my stay here we often examined other graves, but from a warm attachment for the dead, as well as for the living, not a bone was ever removed.

